

Report from The Maritime Professional Council



MPC Summary Report on Kind Leadership



Interviews, research, and report
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Summary Report for MPC on Kind Leadership

1. Introduction

This research was carried out for and on behalf of the Maritime Professional Council UK (MPC) and was triggered by the recent treatment of seafarers highlighted by the media, and the need to promote the professional standards required of leaders, both at sea, and ashore. We hope this report, stimulates industry debate and commitment on how we transform training, to focus on leadership skills and the ethos of same, rather than on today's mostly technical focused training.

2. Approach

We have carried out 14 direct interviews with shipowner/operators, seafarers, professional associations, and leadership professionals. We attended two Nautical Institute Foundation (NIF) meetings on leadership with seven other maritime professionals and have included their opinions in this report. Thus, this makes a total interview count of 21. The reader should note that all quotes are written in italics to clearly separate the expressed opinions of our interviewees from any views of the MPC.

Respondents	Ship		Proff.	Leadership	Total
	Operators	Seafarers	Assoc.	Professionals	
Ship operator	1				
Ship operator	1				
Ship owner	1				
Ship owner	1				
Navigating Officer		1			
Navigating Officer		1			
ex Master Mariner		1			
ex Master Mariner		1			
Prof. Maritime Body			1		
Event on leadership			7		
Fleetwood Nautical College			1		
MNTB			1		
Leadership Consultant				1	
Chartered Organizational Psychologist				1	
Educational Development				1	
Total	4	4	10	3	21

3. Executive Summary

The MPC has found that stakeholders interviewed, including those associated with the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB), generally agree that Human Element, Leadership & Management (HELM) training, as it is currently delivered in the UK, and the International Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping as amended in 2010 (STCW), with its technical focus, are insufficient, and that leadership skills, with a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) pathway, are needed to support career progression from cadet to senior officer. Respondents complained that with shipping lines focusing on cost, rather than value, it's difficult to get many of them to accept this need to invest in leadership training.

However, this initial research has already identified three examples of how leadership training can provide reduced risk, and/or increased profitability. From incidents onboard its ships, one shipping line has identified gaps in competencies and in management training. They identified the need for management training to provide the skills to empower staff to challenge, question, intervene and stop work. One large shipowner, as part of the input into changing its culture, focused on ensuring employees' felt that their welfare, and going home in one piece every night, was genuinely management's priority. This translated into changes in operating approach, which improved performance and profit margins. The Loss Prevention Manager of a leading P&I Club stated that, *"89% of collisions, and 90% of groundings are due to human error"*. This provides evidence of the need to invest in leadership training and avoid fatigue.

The research has clearly identified that leadership is also about ethics. A group of leadership consultants, working across different industries said, *"Start with doing no harm - this puts you in the lane of ethical leadership. It's not score cards, and best practice: It's investing in people that allows discussion and the capture and sharing of knowledge."*

This view was also shared by another group of leadership consultants, some of whom had worked with the MNTB, *"We have many industries and academic studies that have identified all the issues our industry faces. Our training regulators need to look at the already available best practices and research and consider which best suits our future needs. We need to provide leadership & management courses that equip seafarers with the understanding and skills for future roles ashore. We need to train executives ashore, so they lead by example."*

A MNTB representative mirrored the conclusions from our research. They said, *"We need to build transferable skills, critical thinking, strong management, and leadership skills. MCA / MNTB may not know everything, but they do have unique access to expertise across the board."* They also flagged that, *"We make the mistake of cramming so much into the cadet programme, because the shipowners need the cadets to have the necessary skills to work on board, but in reality, there are certain elements that could be delivered on board by the shipowners, once the cadet has qualified. "*

Another leadership consultant noted that, *"Leadership includes the adoption of ethical principles, social justice and collaboration, human to human. It's also about building trust not*

transactional processes. These same leadership principles need to be adopted by stakeholders ashore, so that with the same shared values, the relationship between ship and shore staff can succeed.

A ship operator opined, "It's key to get more representatives of shipping lines onboard at the MNTB to drive the change. There is an over-reliance on colleges, allowing them to set the training agenda, when this should be driven by the training needs and skills audits of shipowners.

The current eight-to-ten-month long trips has produced fatigue. There is short termism by crewing agencies. How can you expect crews to take on ownership of responsibilities when employed on single trip contracts? There is too much disaggregated decision making."

We conclude this summary with quotes from two respondents:

- *"STCW is the bare minimum. It's dull and not working, because it's treated as a process, rather than something that adds value. It just creates greater learning requirements, but without delivering value."*
- *"There are still too many people who don't know how to lead. Leadership should be direction, inspiration, and guidance. Good leaders exhibit courage, passion, confidence, commitment, and ambition. They nurture their people and build teams committed to achieving common goals. It's seldom one sails with these types of people."*

The Maritime Professional Council supports the majority views of the respondents replicated here, that leadership training is required at sea, and ashore, if our industry is to be fit for purpose. We need to inspire debate and construct a practical 'passage plan' for the future, which has the genuine capacity to allow our industry to successfully progress. To that extent, the MPC needs your feedback to this report and ideas on how we move forward. (See Section 5, 'How are we going to take this forward').

4. Extracts of respondent interviews

4.1 Comments on STCW standards & HELM training

"HELM is operational. STCW is the bare minimum standard. It's dull and not working, because it has been treated as a process rather than something that adds value. We keep adding subjects to the extent it has become very modular and just creates greater learning requirements but without delivering value."

"We need to consider what we need overall, in terms of defining current and future leadership skills, and developing a CPD pathway to support one's career progression from cadet to senior officer."

Cadet training: "We need to build transferable skills, critical thinking and strong management and leadership skills, so seafarers can move from sector to sector."

"Colleges set their prospectus, so their training meets current STCW requirements. They talk about leadership, but what they mean is technical training. One college takes cadets off

campus into the countryside on leadership and teamwork training. The cadets use what is learned throughout the course, i.e., how to live, work, and share, with others. Where colleges recognise the need for leadership training, and include it in their curriculum, they find that many of their customers still make the final choice based on price. This makes it difficult to compete in the global market when they include these additional leadership courses.”

“Today, there is not enough exam preparation. It’s unusual for lecturers to have master mariner tickets. They do not have enough sea time experience. Companies are given smart funding but don’t really care about training - UK cadets suffer, but the company gets funds and tax- breaks.”

4.2 Gaps in Training

A major shipping line said, “There is a gap in management training and gaps in competencies, as identified by us from incidents onboard. We need management training to provide the skills to empower staff to challenge, question, intervene and stop work. BRM, CRM are good, but delivery is so varied and fragmented in terms of quality of content. There are no long-term objectives and strategy. The industry doesn’t seem to be speaking from the same page.”

“What we have is good, but it is outdated. Time to review orals. We are still testing with wooden ships when more can be done with online simulators. Too much training consists of hours in the classroom. We need to train seafarers to mentor their colleagues.”

4.3 Leadership training is needed at sea and ashore

“Leadership should be about direction, inspiration, and guidance. Good leaders exhibit courage, passion, confidence, commitment, and ambition. They nurture the strengths and talents of their people and build teams committed to achieving common goals. It’s seldom one sails with these types of people. Leadership is about making sure people feel valued. We need these values at sea, and we need management to embrace these values and lead by example if leadership training is to be successful.”

“The first master I sailed with recognised that cadets need to experience life at sea and involved them in briefings as part of the professional team. Shore leave was expected, so cadets experienced new cultures. The Master spent time having coffee with crew and engineers. Weekly BBQs were held to give the chef a break and to bring everyone together.”

“The next master worked crew hard: No shore leave. Drills were a ‘tick box’ exercise. It was an unhappy team. A kind leader makes for a happy team and removes the barrier between the master and the crew. It’s the crew at the sharp end that have the good ideas on making things more efficient and safer.”

“People at sea still think authority tinged with fear is the best mix for effective leadership. But some of the best leaders are the quiet and kind. They achieve respect because they showed an interest in all the crewmembers individually, whom collectively would do anything to support the captain.”¹

¹ These quotes clearly identify the benefits of good leadership and disadvantages of not doing so. Implementing them is the key to success.

4.4 Interviews with Generic Leadership Consultants

"We have very few leaders that can lead. MBAs are not the solution. Leadership needs to be elastic and more visionary. 'Box ticking' is not enough, as it doesn't mitigate risk, or provide robust systems. So why is there such an emphasis on processes and box ticking?

Leadership is about ethical principles, social justice, trust and collaboration, human to human. It's about:

- *Building trust, not transactional processes.*
- *Meticulous effort over time, allowing people to understand change.*
- *Knowledge sharing.*

Not surrounding yourselves with others with the same 'group think', who will agree with you, because you all share the same psychometric profile. In this case you get yes men.²

It's also about:

IQ = you need intelligence.

EQ = you need emotional intelligence.

SQ = social intelligence and how to interact.

You need curiosity, courage, the ability to ask the right questions, and to do good."

4.5 The need to change - perceptions of shipowners

Part of the solution lies in demonstrating the cost benefits of training and risks and disadvantages of not doing so. P&I Clubs have the accident data and associated costs to quickly slay this 'elephant in the room', where owners are saying that training is expensive. Suppose we train our people, and they leave. Suppose we don't train our people and they stay.

The Loss Prevention Manager of a leading P&I Club stated that: *"89% of collisions are due to human error and 90% of groundings are due to human error. This is evidence of the need to invest more in leadership training and avoiding fatigue."*

"Ship operators and associated stakeholders are still too focused on processes and price, and not on value and ethics. A new MD brought in to 'turn around a business' is not going to be able to change a leadership culture in 12 months, it takes a few years of dedicated focus. If we want to get it right on our ships, we need to educate and stimulate this change in values, so they are adopted by our leaders ashore."

One interview with a ship operator yielded the following: *"The new management recognised it was essential that employees needed to understand and believe that their health, safety, and welfare were a genuine priority, to send everyone home safely every night, as part of the input into changing the culture. Over a period of years, this translated into changes in the operating approach and safety standards, which improved performance, profit margins, and gave employees a desire to support the company and improve its performance. Consequently, there was a queue of quality people waiting to join the company. It took ten years to achieve optimum progress towards a genuinely changed company culture. There are no quick fixes here. To achieve a truly changed operating culture, trust is the most important commodity that can take years to establish, but which can be lost overnight! It took years to get traction.*

² Group Think' is often a product of autocratic leadership, and /or selecting staff for their similar profiles. The space shuttle Challenger disaster was an unfortunate product of this.

However, once achieved, lost time injuries and damage to equipment reduced and profits went up dramatically. Once employees care about the company, they look after each other and become 'their brother's and sister's keeper', while caring for the company and its equipment. This all flows down to an improved bottom line. Today, people & their Boards, want quick fixes. They don't want to hear it's going to take time."

"Start with 'do no harm' - this puts you in the lane of ethical leadership. Unfortunately, one governs based on the law of averages. It's not score cards and best practice. It's about investing in people that allows discussion and the capture and sharing of knowledge."

"In the UK we have many industries and academic studies that have identified all the issues our industry faces. Our training regulators need to look at the already available best practices and research and consider which best suits our future needs. We need to provide leadership & management courses that equip seafarers with the understanding and skills for future roles ashore. We need to train executives ashore, so they lead by example. We need to reach the stage where those at sea no longer receive emails that start with the sentence, 'I fail to understand.....' We need to put right this failure of leadership to understand."

"The Master 'top down' method doesn't work anymore. There needs to be empowerment. Ship time should be four months on board. The current eight to ten months has produced fatigue. There is short termism by crewing agencies. How can you expect crews to take on ownership of responsibilities when employed on single trip contracts? There is too much disaggregated decision making."

5. How are we going to take this forward?

The Maritime Professional Council, (MPC), is an umbrella organisation representing nine major maritime professional associations³, providing a central point from which professional opinion on maritime matters can be offered to the maritime community, industry, Government, and the media.

To carry this project forward and avoid this being just another conversation piece, the MPC now seeks direct input from seafarers and stakeholders. Harvesting your ideas and solutions will be invaluable, will move the debate forward and enable us to suggest a 'passage plan' that facilitates real industry progress and success. Please do respond with your feedback on this document, and any offers of help you may wish to make to the undersigned providers of this report.



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³The Honourable Company of Master Mariners; The Nautical Institute; The International Institute of Marine Surveying; The Institute of Seamanship; The Institute of Surveying; The International Maritime Pilots Association, The Professional Charter Association, Trinity House, InterManager and Cameron Maritime Resources.